

# Paul Phillip Levertoff: Pioneering Hebrew-Christian Scholar and Leader

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*My father danced a Hassidic dance the day before he died.  
His daughters they were far away, his wife was by his side...  
He danced for Jesus his Messiah who rose up from the dead  
And left the tomb for the upper room  
and was known in the breaking of bread...  
Except you become as a little child my kingdom you shall not see.  
So he danced in his joy as he did when a boy and often he danced for me...<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Paul Phillip Levertoff is best known to the modern world as the Jewish believer in Jesus (JB) who helped translate the Zohar into English for Soncino Press, a leading publisher of Judaica.<sup>2</sup> Less well known about Levertoff, as we will see, is the fact that he was a major pioneer in the Hebrew Christian movement of his time. The noted historian on JBs, Jakób Jocz, includes Levertoff in his short list of distinguished late 19th and early 20th century JB,

*Of the many other missionaries of the house of Israel, the names of Salkinson, Cassel, Lucky, the two Lichtensteins, Schönberger, Joseph Immanuel Landsmann, and Dr. P. P. Levertoff... They can all be characterized by devotion to the missionary cause, simplicity of faith, and great Talmudic learning.<sup>3</sup>*

In the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, several on Jocz's list are given their own entries and Levertoff is one of these few.<sup>4</sup> Levertoff comes rather late on the scene, too

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<sup>1</sup> Olga [Tatjana] Levertoff, "The Ballad of My Father" in Denise Levertov, *The Sorrow Dance* (New York: New Directions, 1966), 93-94.

<sup>2</sup> See Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Phillip Levertoff (translators), *Zohar*. Vol. 3 (London: Soncino Press, 1933); Maurice Simon and Paul Phillip Levertoff (translators), *Zohar*. Vol. 4. (London: Soncino Press, 1933).

<sup>3</sup> Jakób Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: S. P. C. K., 1949), 255.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, Vol. 11, 1972), 71; Cf. Leonard Prager, *Yiddish Culture in Britain* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 405.

late to be included in the principal biographies or studies on JBJ.<sup>5</sup> He is conspicuously absent in one modern biographical anthology of JBJ.<sup>6</sup> This article endeavors to provide a brief assessment of Levertoff's life and work, focusing on the interesting highlights and accomplishments in his life.

### Early Life

Paul Phillip Levertoff was born in Orsha, Belarus, to Saul and Batya Levertoff.<sup>7</sup> When this happened is not entirely clear: one source<sup>8</sup> states 12 October 1875, while another<sup>9</sup> states 14 October 1878. His birth name was probably not "Paul Phillip." In a letter in Hebrew from Paul's father, Saul Levertoff, to Paul Levertoff himself, Saul Levertoff employs Paul's Hebrew/Yiddish name, "Feivel"<sup>10</sup> This was almost certainly his original Jewish name since "Paul Phillip" is a Christian name.

His family came from a Sephardic background whose religious persuasion was Hassidic.<sup>11</sup> According to more than one source,<sup>12</sup> he was a descendent of Rabbi Schneur Zalman. He received a traditional education in the *cheder* (a Hebrew primary school). In one instance, Denise Levertov, his younger daughter,<sup>13</sup> describes her father's first childhood encounter with the New Testament and Jesus:

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Bernstein, *Jewish Witnesses for Christ* (London: O.J.C.I., 1909) [reprinted 1999 by Keren Ahvah Meshihit, Israel]; Johannes Friedrich Alexander de le Roi, *Die evangelische Christenheit und die Juden*, Volumes 1, 2, and 3 (Berlin: H. Reuther, 1891).

<sup>6</sup> See Jacob Gartenhaus. *Famous Hebrew Christians*. TN: I.B.J.M. (1998); The most likely explanation why Levertoff is not included in this book is that Gartenhaus himself states (p. 12) that he is heavily dependent on late 19th century secondary sources (cf. note 6).

<sup>7</sup> Karina Lehnardt. "LEVERTOFF, Paul Phillip." <<http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/1/Levertoff.shtml>> June 1998.

<sup>8</sup> According to an e-mail copy (dated 7 March 2002) of an unpublished record on Levertoff, courtesy of Charles Hundley from "The Church's Ministry among the Jewish People" (or CMJ, formerly known as the London Jews Society or the LJS) with its headquarters based in England. According to this information, Levertoff's birth date is "12 Oct 1875 at Janowitsch, near Vitwpsk, Russia". This becomes more interesting: he applied for work with the LJS in late 1896 (according to the unpublished CMJ record). If he was born in 1875, he would have been 21 years old at the time of application, otherwise if he was born in 1878 he would only have been 18 years old—rather young to be employed by the LJS!

<sup>9</sup> Karina Lehnardt, "LEVERTOFF, Paul Phillip."

<sup>10</sup> Denise Levertov Papers, M0601, Box 15, Folder 17. Thanks to Tsvi Sadan for pointing this out.

<sup>11</sup> Olga Tatjana Levertoff, "Paul Levertoff and the Jewish-Christian Problem" in Lev Gillet (ed.), *Judaism and Christianity/Essays presented to the Rev. Paul P. Levertoff, D.D.* (London: J.B. Shears & Sons, 1939), 93.

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Schneur Zalman was "...his [grandfather's] mother's uncle..." ([no author]. "Thirty Years Work" from *The Church and the Jews*, No. 180, Autumn (1954), 4, located in the Denise Levertov Papers, M0601, Box 34, Folder 36); Cf., Linda Welshimer Wagner, *Denise Levertov* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Levertoff had two daughters: Olga Tatjana Levertoff and Denise Levertov. Denise changed the spelling of her surname to 'Levertov' because her sister was already getting published with the surname 'Levertoff' so readers could distinguish between them.

*One day when he was eight or nine my father was walking home ...As he trudged homeward my father's eye was caught by a scrap of printed paper lying in the gray, trampled snow. Though he was a playful, disobedient boy like any other, he was also – like his playmates – a little Talmud scholar, respectful of words; and he saw at a glance, too, that this paper was not printed in Russian but in Hebrew. So he picked it up and began to read. Could it be a fragment of Torah? Never before had he read such a story: about a boy like himself who – it said – was found in the Temple expounding the scriptures to the old, reverent, important rabbis! [Luke 2:46-47]*

*My father took the scrap – it was obviously a page from a book – home to his father. The effect was startling. ...his father became angry – not with him, exactly, but rather with the text he had brought to show him. He tore it into pieces and thrust them into the stove. My father was vehemently told to avoid such writings, utterly, if ever he should again encounter them; but just what they were, and how to tell them from holy writ, was not explained. My father was averted to see written words destroyed – Hebrew words. It was not if it had been a mere scrap of Russian newspaper.*

*Secretly, he wished he had not given up the mysterious fragment. Who was the wise boy in the story?*<sup>14</sup>

An interest had awakened in the young Levertov. By his teenage years, he was attending the Volozhin Yeshiva.<sup>15</sup> This Lithuanian Jewish seminary was one of the most prominent in its day. Here Levertov received an exemplary rabbinic education,<sup>16</sup> knowledge that he would demonstrate in his later years. He was on his way to becoming a rabbi. Denise Levertov called her father “a precocious graduate...”<sup>17</sup> of this institute, which meant he graduated early. Afterwards Saul Levertov, Paul Levertov's father, had to send him out of the country to the Prussian city of Königsberg (modern day Kaliningrad) to obtain a university education because Jews were not permitted to study in Russian universities.

Paul Phillip Levertov's fascination with Jesus continued through his adolescent years. It was near the end of the 19th century, at the University of Königsberg where Levertov reached a very important conclusion about Jesus that would affect him the rest of his life for it was here

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Denise became a very famous poet in America who later became Catholic but still considered herself Jewish. She died in late 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Denise Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions* (New York: New Directions Books, 1995), 4-5. Another source mentions the scrap of paper to be from the book of John, cf. “...one day [Levertov] found about the street of the little Russian town some leaves torn from a book that had been printed in Hebrew, he was amazed to read something that seemed to him Hassidic; but so strange, for it related in detail an account of the Messiah who had been crucified. It was parts of the Gospel according to St. John.” (“Thirty Years Work”, 4)

<sup>15</sup> Located at the time in what is currently modern Belarus. This Yeshiva was founded in 1802 by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821), a disciple of the Vilna Gaon. Much of the Jewish population of Volozhin perished in the Holocaust. Today, the Yeshiva survives transplanted in Israel. Denise Levertov misspells it “Valójine”, Jewel Spears Brooker (ed.), *Conversations with Denise Levertov* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 90.) and “Volójine” which appears to be the French spelling (Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions*, 6).

<sup>16</sup> Denise Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Denise Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions*, 6.

...in the Gentile, utterly secular atmosphere of the Prussian city, this book [i.e., the Gospels] of the Christians seemed more his than theirs. He read it in German, then in Hebrew... And as he read he experienced a profound and shaking new conviction. This Jesus of Nazareth...had indeed been the Messiah.<sup>18</sup>

The year this occurred was 1895<sup>19</sup> when Levertov was only 17 or 18 years old. Predictably his “family was appalled”<sup>20</sup> after he told them of his new belief. At this point, he seems to have had a major argument with his father – most likely over his new belief – that led him to abruptly leave home.<sup>21</sup> Without financial support from his parents, he had to go it alone. He was baptized in 11 August 1895 in Königsberg.<sup>22</sup> For the next several years he “...supported himself by tutoring and undertaking translations to and from the various languages he knew.”<sup>23</sup> Seeking employment as a missionary on 11 December 1896,<sup>24</sup> he applied for a position with the London Jews Society (LJS).<sup>25</sup> He was accepted and soon worked full time in his new vocation.

### Missionary Translator and Writer

For reasons unknown, Levertov changed Jewish missions organizations in 1901, having joined the staff of the Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel (HCTI), founded by two other JBJ, David Baron and Charles Andrew Schönberger in 1893. A thorough search of the CMJ archives in Oxford might shed light on the question of what Levertov did in the LJS.

Levertov first appeared in the HCTI's periodical, *The Scattered Nation* in 1901<sup>26</sup> and continued to appear frequently in its pages through 1909 in his reports and articles. He was one of the HCTI's most active missionaries, traveling throughout Europe and the Mediterranean under their employ. He usually traveled together with David Baron, who was 23 years older than

<sup>18</sup> Denise Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions*, 7; cf., Jewel Spears Brooker (ed.), *Conversations with Denise Levertov* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 90.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Karina Lehnardt, “LEVERTOFF, Paul Phillip.”; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “Levertov, Paul Phillip”; “Thirty Years Work”, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Denise Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Reportedly later in his life, Levertov, regretted having fled his parents because they did not agree with his new belief that Jesus was the Messiah for he “...often felt that if he had been wiser he would have gained his father, for he realised how near the Kingdom he was.” (“Thirty Years Work”, 4).

<sup>22</sup> E-mail from Charles Hundley of CMJ (dated 7 March 2002) of an unpublished record on Levertov.

<sup>23</sup> Denise Levertov, *Tessarae/Memorie & Suppositions*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> E-mail from Charles Hundley of CMJ (dated 7 March 2002) of an unpublished record on Levertov.

<sup>25</sup> Short for “The London Society for promoting Christianity amongst the Jews”.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Levertov, “Experiences at Our New Centre” in *The Scattered Nation* 26 (April 1901), 253-255.

Levertoff. They visited Hungary and Bosnia in 1905<sup>27</sup> and Egypt and Palestine in 1908.<sup>28</sup>

No less than seven original works and translations in Hebrew by Levertoff were published in London between 1902 and 1909 by several London area publishers and the HCTI publishing house's Hebrew name, *Edut leYisrael*.<sup>29</sup> His Hebrew writings did not go unnoticed within Jewish missionary circles: Arthur Lukyn Williams said "Good work has been done in recent years in the presentation of the life of our Lord to the Jews by...Levertoff. In this connection may be mentioned... Levertoff's *St. Paul. His Life, Works, and Travels*, 1907 (in modern Hebrew)..."<sup>30</sup> For nearly a decade, he served the HCTI as their principal Hebrew translator and writer.

Also noteworthy about Levertoff's Hebrew writings was the fact that *Viduyei Augustinus ha-Kadosh* ("The Confessions of St. Augustine") was the first translation into Hebrew of a major work by a Latin Church Father. Levertoff's book on Jesus in Hebrew, *Ben ha-Adam*, ("The Son of Man") predated Joseph Klausner's own book on Jesus, *Yeshu ha-Notsri*,<sup>31</sup> by over 17 years, which itself is generally considered the first book written on Jesus and Christianity's early beginnings by a Jewish scholar in Modern Hebrew. Regarding Levertoff's *Ben ha-Adam*, Klausner said,

*The plain purpose of the writer (in spite of what he says to the contrary in his Preface [to Ben ha-Adam], p. xxi) is to win adherents to Christianity from among Russian Jews who read Hebrew; and such a book is not to be relied upon for objective and single-minded scholarship. The author skillfully refrains from imposing upon us most of the unacceptable miracles; he follows (as he tells us in his preface) P.W. Schmidt's excellent "Die Geschichte Jesu erzählt..." save that he conceals a few miracles and some missionary teaching in an account of natural facts (obviously not always explained as they should be) and a presentation of the ethical teachings of Jesus. . . . And this has been the only work about Jesus in modern Hebrew literature!*<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> David Baron & Paul Levertoff, "Down the Danube to Hungary and Bosnia" in *The Scattered Nation* 42 (April 1905), 317.

<sup>28</sup> David Baron & Paul Levertoff, "A Mission Tour of Egypt and Palestine" in *The Scattered Nation* 55 (July 1908), 135-150.

<sup>29</sup> The titles of the publication were as follows: *Yisra'el, emunato ute'udato* [Israel's Religion and Destiny] (London: Edut leYisrael, 1902); *Ben ha-Adam, Chayey Yeshua ha-Mashiach upealav* [The Son of Man. A Survey of the Life and Deeds of Jesus Christ] (London, 1904); *ha-Amek She'ala* (London, 1905) [partial Hebrew translation of Franz Delitzsch's *Ernste Fragen an die Gebildeten Jüdischer Religion*]; *Polus ha-Shaliach, o, Sha'ul ish Tarsus: hayav, po'olav u-nesi'otav* [St. Paul. His Life, Works, and Travels] (London: Y. Neroditski, 1905); *Viduyei Augustinus ha-Kadosh* [The Confessions of St. Augustine]. (London: Luzac, 1906); *Tomas Karlel: hashkefotav vede'otav, reshimot bikortiyot* [Thomas Carlyle. A Lecture] (London: Luzac, 1907); *Hu veAni* [He and I] (London: Edut leYisrael, 1909).

<sup>30</sup> Hermann L. Strack, *Jahrbuch der evangelischen Judenmission/Yearbook of the Evangelical Missions among the Jews*, Vol. 2 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichssche Buchhandlung, 1913), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Klausner, *Yeshu ha-Notsri: zemano, hayav ve-torato*. Jerusalem: Shtibel [1922], 3; (In English:) Joseph Klausner. *Jesus Of Nazareth* (New York: MacMillan, 1925), 11.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Klausner, *Jesus Of Nazareth*, 124.

Among Levertoff's publications from 1902 and 1909, *Hu veAni*<sup>33</sup> ("He and I") is worth discussing because of its seemingly autobiographical veneer. It is the story of a young yeshiva student, a JBJ, who is going to be punished for his belief. Another character in the story is an old friend of his who knew him before he came to his new belief in Jesus through the efforts of a wandering missionary. The main character escapes his punishment through chance and the two characters desire to discuss belief in Jesus; however, the main character, the JBJ, has to leave the town the next morning. The story ends before this occurs. It is apparent that Levertoff integrates some of his own early personal history into this story. He is like the main character, who leaves his town because of his belief in Jesus, which came about through his encounter with missionary literature.

In 1910, Baron announced in *The Scattered Nation* that "Mr. Paul Levertoff [had] accept[ed] an invitation from the United Free Church of Scotland Jewish Committee to take the position of Evangelist in Constantinople [and] is no longer a member of our missionary board." In Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) in 1910, Levertoff met the lady who would later become his wife, Beatrice Spooner-Jones.<sup>34</sup> She was Welsh not Jewish. They returned to England to get married. In 1911, with the LJS he attended an important Jewish missions conference in Stockholm, Sweden.<sup>35</sup> That same year, Levertoff moved with his family to Warsaw.<sup>36</sup> He would soon (again) change employers and begin a new career in academia.

### Germany: Teacher and Scholar

Levertoff's life solely as a professional missionary would soon come to an end since he would have a new job in a new city. He was appointed to the position of teacher of Hebrew and Rabbinics with the Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum (IJD), a postgraduate institute for Jewish missions founded by Franz Delitzsch in Leipzig, Germany. Otto von Harling, the IJD's director, publicized that Levertoff was relocating from Warsaw to Leipzig on 1 April 1912,<sup>37</sup> to take over the teaching position at the IJD, which had been left vacant by the death of Jechiel Zebi Herschensohn-Lichtenstein<sup>38</sup> (hereafter

<sup>33</sup> In my comments, I refer to Levertoff's own English translation of *Hu veAni*, "Two of Them"; Cf. Paul P. Levertoff. "Two of Them" in Henry Einspruch (ed.). *When Jews face Christ* [First Edition] (Baltimore, MD: The Mediator, 1932), 144-156. Note Levertoff's translation is not published in the second edition of Einspruch's *When Jews face Christ* (Brooklyn: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1939).

<sup>34</sup> Denise Levertov, *New & Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), 259.

<sup>35</sup> Hermann L. Strack, *Jahrbuch der evangelischen Judenmission/ Yearbook of the Evangelical Missions among the Jews*, Vol. 2 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichssche Buchhandlung, 1913), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Denise Levertov, *Light Up The Cave* (New York: New Directions Books, 1981), 241.

<sup>37</sup> Otto von Harling, "An die Gesellschaften für Judenmission und die Freunde des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum!" in *Saat auf Hoffnung* 49 (1912), 92.

<sup>38</sup> Herschensohn-Lichtenstein (1831-1912) translated about half of the *Tanach* into Yiddish. He was also a prolific Hebrew writer who among his many writings wrote

Lichtenstein). He was a JBJ *maskil*<sup>39</sup> of Romanian Hassidic background who had held the position from 1885 until his death on 12 February 1912. A year later, Levertoff and a colleague posthumously published Lichtenstein's revised Matthew commentary in Hebrew.<sup>40</sup> The IJD's class schedules from 1912 to 1917 (published in its journal *Saat auf Hoffnung*) have Levertoff teaching a variety of courses: Yiddish language, the New Testament in Hebrew based on Lichtenstein's commentary, Midrash, Isaac Troki's polemical work *Hizzuk Emunah*, various books of the *Tanach* based on traditional Rabbinic commentaries, and a variety of other similar subjects in Jewish studies, Rabbinics and the New Testament.

Levertoff seemed to flourish in his new job for the next few years despite having to endure unusual adversity for several years. During World War I (1914-1916), he was under house arrest as a prisoner of war because he was a Russian citizen. This did not in any way stop him academically; he was quite prolific. In addition to Hebrew, he now wrote extensively in German which included a number of articles for *Saat auf Hoffnung*. According to his older daughter,

*The War [WW I] deprived him of his post, but kept him in Germany until the Armistice, as a prisoner who, it is interesting to note, was, in spite of many hardships, commissioned by the University [of Leipzig] to write three books:*

1. *The edition and German translation, with commentary, of the Pesikta Rabbati, a collection of ancient Synagogue homilies never before translated into any language.*
2. *German translation of the whole of the Palestinian Talmud [Talmud Yerushalmi], with commentary.*
3. *"Die religiöse Denkweise der Chassidim" – the first systematic treatise on intellectual Jewish mysticism.*

*The first and third of these works were produced, though, for lack of funds, only the third was published. The Talmud... never reached the public...[because of] the advent of a new "race-cultured" system in Germany... render[ed] its publication impossible.*<sup>41</sup>

*Die religiöse Denkweise der Chassidim* did indeed see the light of day.<sup>42</sup> Levertoff eventually made an English adaptation of it that he later published as

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what is probably the only commentary on the whole New Testament in Hebrew (recently republished in Israel). He was more commonly known to Christian readers by the name of "J. Lichtenstein" and is not to be confused with the Hungarian Orthodox Rabbi, Isaac (Ignatz) Lichtenstein, another JBJ. His story is a worthy topic for further investigation since so little biographical information available about him is published in English; See Jorge Quiñónez. "An Introductory Bio-bibliography to Jechiel Zebi Herschensohn-Lichtenstein (1831-1912)" in *Kesher* 15 (Summer 2002), 78-89.

<sup>39</sup> The *maskilim* (singular *maskil*) were participants of the *Haskalah*, the "enlightenment", a Jewish movement originating in 18th century Germany aimed at modernizing Jewish life and thought or the integration of Jews into the larger society. Notable features within the movement was *maskilim* cooperation with liberal-minded Christian thinkers and that much of the *maskilim* literature was disseminated in Hebrew; Cf. Shmuel Feiner & David Sorkin, *New Perspectives on the Haskalah* (Oregon: Littman, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Jechiel Zebi Lichtenstein, *Beur lesifrei berit hachdashah* /Kerech [aleph]: Matai . Paul Levertoff & Heinrich Laible (eds.) (Leipzig, 1913); It was republished in Yehiel Tsvi Lichtenstein. *Sugiyot nibharot besefer haberit hadashah* [A Commentary on Selected Portions From the New Testament] (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 2002), 13-63.

<sup>41</sup> Olga Tatjana Levertoff, "Paul Levertoff and the Jewish-Christian Problem", 99.

*Love and the Messianic Age*.<sup>43</sup> Both of these works were pioneering from the context of a comparative religion perspective. They were Levertoff's attempts in exploring similarities between Hassidic and New Testament theology. This study would later become very important theme in later writings because of his desire to create a theology that would be acceptable and used in a community of JBJ. The original text and German translation of *Pesikta Rabbati* is extant in manuscript form<sup>44</sup> in the Stanford University Libraries. It is unfortunate that Levertoff never even had the opportunity to begin his translation and commentary of the Palestinian Talmud into German.

His time with IJD lasted until 1918 when he left Germany for England. World War One had left him and his family impoverished.<sup>45</sup>

### England: The Issue of a Hebrew-Christian Church

Levertoff and his family returned to his wife's native Wales, where, between 1919 through 1922, he held the position of librarian at St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden (Flintshire County). During this time, he was also ordained by the Archbishop of Wales into the Church of England.<sup>46</sup> In 1923, he became Director of the East London Fund for the Jews and took over Holy Trinity, a church in Shoreditch while making his residence in Ilford. While in this position, he published the quarterly *The Church and the Jews*. As spiritual leader of Holy Trinity, he realized his goal of having a "Hebrew Christian Church" where JBJ could worship by making it familiar to them which "...would make a much stronger appeal than Missionary Societies organized by Gentiles."<sup>47</sup> He followed in the tradition of Joseph Rabinowitz<sup>48</sup> and Hayyim Yedidiah Pollak,<sup>49</sup> to establish an independent community and congregation of JBJ. Levertoff appealed to "... those Jews who are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ and of their Jewish origin ... to unite as a community ... and institute Jewish Christian services of worship which would present our Faith in terms of the rich background of devotional and mystical Jewish traditions."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Paul Levertoff, *Die religiöse Denkweise der Chassidim* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1918).

<sup>43</sup> Paul Levertoff, *Love and the messianic age in hitherto untranslated Hasidic writings with special reference to the Fourth Gospel* (London, Episcopal Hebrew Christian Church, 1923).

<sup>44</sup> Denise Levertov Papers, M0601, Box 33, Folders 1 and 2.

<sup>45</sup> Olga Tatjana Levertoff, "Paul Levertoff and the Jewish-Christian Problem", 100.

<sup>46</sup> Olga Tatjana Levertoff, "Paul Levertoff and the Jewish-Christian Problem", 100.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Levertoff, "Editorial" in *The Church and the Jews*, No. 79 (London, April 1929), 7 [located in the Denise Levertov Papers, M0601, Box 34, Folder 25].

<sup>48</sup> Kai Kjær-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans/Handsels, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Also known as Christian Theophilus Lucky (1864-1916); Cf. Henry Einspruch, "A Lamed-Vovnik" in Henry and Marie Einspruch (eds.) *Would I? Would You?* (Baltimore: Lederer Foundation, 1970), 74-78; Cf. Theodor Zoeckler, "Christian Theophilus Lucky" in *Saat auf Hoffnung* 60, (Leipzig, 1917), 2-8.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Levertoff, *The Possibility of a Hebrew-Christian Church* (London: Conferences of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland, no date), 4; according to Gershon Nerel this same title appeared as an article in *The Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly*, vol. 7 (1924).



To that end in 1925, Levertoff published his Hebrew liturgy *Meal of the Holy King*<sup>51</sup> that was his own attempt to establish a liturgy for a Hebrew Christian church. In the late 19th century, the LJS and Rabinowitz,<sup>52</sup> had their own Hebrew liturgies for JBJ. Additionally, Levertoff's contemporary Leon Averbuch, a Romanian JBJ leader, employed several different Hebrew and Yiddish hymnbooks.<sup>53</sup> Levertoff, now an Anglican priest, certainly had the option of employing the LJS's Hebrew translation of the Anglican Church's Book of Common Prayer (BCP), which the LJS had used in Christ Church under Michael Solomon Alexander in Jerusalem, a JBJ and Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, in the mid-19th century.<sup>54</sup> However, rather than employ the standard Anglican liturgy in Hebrew he went to the trouble to write his own Hebrew liturgy that he entitled *Meal of the Holy King*.

Levertoff read from a Torah scroll with tallit and kippah as part of the Hebrew services at Holy Trinity. While it was not a new thing to have a Hebrew liturgy for JBJ in England since the LJS had used the Hebrew BCP at times in their own chapel, this was one step closer to a native Jewish Christian liturgy. The liturgy was original, Jewish in authorship, faithful to the sources and not just a plain Hebrew translation of a Christian liturgical text. Comparisons to Rabinowitz's own Hebrew liturgy *Tefilah*, while interesting, are beyond the scope of this paper.

Within the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (IHCA), Levertoff was highly respected, but he was not entirely associated with the Alliance itself. At a missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1931, Frederick Levison, son of Sir Leon Levison, said of Levertoff:

... the outstanding contribution came from Dr Paul Levertoff... It was on literature for the Jews, a subject on the Alliance's agenda, and Leon applauded [Levertoff's] plea for the Hebrew tongue, so sacred to the Jew, and for a Hebrew New Testament and commentary. Dr Levertoff became ... a key member of the subsequent Commission on a Hebrew Christian Church, without wholly identifying himself with the Alliance.<sup>55</sup>

Levertoff himself mentions his involvement with the IHCA's Hebrew Christian Church Commission in 1932 in his publication, *The Church and the*

<sup>51</sup> *Seder kiddush disudhata demalka kadisha /The Order of Service of the Meal of the Holy King* , Shoreditch (London: Mowbray, 1925).

<sup>52</sup> Kai Kjær-Hansen, "Two Nineteenth Century Hebrew ' Siddurim'" in *Mishkan* 25 (1996), 50-59; Cf., Jorge Quiñónez (ed.), *TEFILAH/ Joseph Rabinowitz's/Prayerbook from 1892 /A Transcribed Edition* (2000), unpublished mss.

<sup>53</sup> *The Hebrew Christian* , International Hebrew Christian Alliance, Vol. LXII, No. 1, (March-May 1989), 11.

<sup>54</sup> Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, LJS missionary, Aaron Bernstein, stated that "...our Hebrew Prayer Book has now become almost an obsolete book, as it is only used in Jerusalem and for missionary purposes." from Aaron Bernstein. "A Formation of a Hebrew-Christian Church: Is It Desirable?" in *Jewish Missionary Intelligence* (May 1902), 68.

<sup>55</sup> Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew/The Life of Leon Levison 1881-1936* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press Ltd., 1989), 209-210.

*Jews*.<sup>56</sup> In the same space, he presents his own draft for the “The Ten Principles of the Faith of the Hebrew Christian Church” much of which was later incorporated into the final version as “The Proposed Articles of Faith for the Hebrew Christian Church.”<sup>57</sup> Nerel points out that the death of Levison in 1935 drastically changed the IHCA’s attitude towards a Hebrew Christian Church,

... the IHCA ... seriously considered establishing a Hebrew Christian Church ... The main motivator for this was Sir Leon Levison, born in Safed and first President of the IHCA... However, after Levison’s death in 1935, the IHCA drastically withdrew from its official policy to form a global Hebrew Christian church under its wings.<sup>58</sup>

The IHCA’s change in policy signaled the end for further official discussion for a Hebrew Christian Church within the IHCA proper. However, for three decades with little or no aid from the IHCA, Levertoff led his congregation while keeping a low profile.

During 1920s and 1930s, he transferred his scholarly prowess for ancient Jewish texts from the German into the English language. In 1933, along with Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, he helped translate the Zohar into English for the first time for Soncino Press (see note 2). Such involved work on the Zohar by a JBJ had not been done in several centuries.<sup>59</sup> Levertoff also translated the Sifre on Numbers,<sup>60</sup> a halakhic midrashic text, into English for the first time.<sup>61</sup> While he only translated about a fifth of the text, it served as the only available translation for the next 60 years until Jacob Neusner had a translation of his own published.<sup>62</sup>

During his tenure as the priest at Holy Trinity, in addition to leading a small community of JBJ, Levertoff assisted everyone from Hans Herzl<sup>63</sup>, also a JBJ and son of Theodore Herzl, to providing succor to JBJ refugees from Austria and

<sup>56</sup> Paul Levertoff, “Editorial” in *The Church and the Jews*, No. 91 (London, April 1932), 6-7 [located in the Denise Levertov Papers, M0601, Box 34, Folder 27].

<sup>57</sup> Robert I. Winer, *The Calling/The History of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America*. PA: MJAA (1990), 122-23; See also Gershon Nerel, “Creeds among Jewish Believers in Yeshua between World Wars” in *Mishkan* 34 (2001), 65-69.

<sup>58</sup> Gershon Nerel, “Attempts to Establish a ‘Messianic Jewish Church’ in Eretz-Israel” in *Mishkan* 28 (1998), 40.

<sup>59</sup> I am referring to the very lengthy *Messianic* commentary on the Zohar by the JBJ Johann Kemper (died 1714); Cf. Elliot R. Wolfson. “Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper,” in *Millenarianism and Messianism in the Early Modern European Culture: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, edited by Matthew D. Goldish and Richard H. Popkin (the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 139-187. For a good biographical account of Kemper, see the chapter entitled “‘Rabbi’ Johan Kemper in Uppsala” in Hans Joachim Schoeps. *Philosemitismus im Barock* (Germany: J.C.B. (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen, 1952), 92-133.

<sup>60</sup> Paul P. Levertoff, *Midrash Sifre on Numbers/Selections from Early Rabbinic Scriptural Interpretations* (London: S. P. C. K., 1926).

<sup>61</sup> H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Scotland: T&T Clark, 1991), 292.

<sup>62</sup> According to Strack and Stemberger, 292: Jacob Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanations*, 2 vols (Atlanta, 1986).

<sup>63</sup> This is a very tragic story. Hans Herzl became a JBJ in 1924 and committed suicide in 1930; Cf. Einspruch, *When Jews face Christ*, 12-13; Cf. Hans Herzl, Letter to Mr. Levertoff. July 29, 1926 (Denise Levertov Papers, M0601, Box 11, Folder 8).

Nazi Germany.<sup>64</sup> A very interesting aspect about Levertoff's life in England, which I will only briefly touch upon was Levertoff's relations with the Jewish intelligentsia of the time, many fleeing Nazi oppression or on their way to America or British Mandatory Palestine, who made London their home for a time. For example, Levertoff corresponded with the *maskil* Joseph Brenner<sup>65</sup> and had many discussions with the Yiddish writer Sholem Asch.<sup>66</sup> Levertoff surely kept current with the Hebrew press of his time as J. Klausner observed:

*In [Levertoff's] introduction [to Ben ha-Adam] he indulges in argument against "Ahad ha-Am," Dr. Neumark, S. J. Horowitz, Dr. Bernfeld and the present writer [Klausner], because of their articles in Ha-Shiloach on the "Nature of Judaism" they did not perceive the advantages of Christianity.*<sup>67</sup>

### A Lost Work

One intriguing work by Levertoff that unfortunately no longer appears to be extant is *Christ and the Shekinah*, which Lev Gillet, a friend of Levertoff, first mentioned in 1939:

*This question of the Shekinah and its relationship with Christology is, as we know it, in the center of Dr. Levertoff's theological concerns. This is why the work Christ and the Shekinah that for a long time he prepared on the topic will be "the book of his life."*<sup>68</sup>

Several years later, in 1942, he alludes to it again: "Levertoff has also written a great work still unpublished on *Christ and the Shekinah*."<sup>69</sup> Levertoff as early as the 1920s when he wrote *Love and the Messianic Age* was trying to integrate Christian and Jewish theologies as Gillet explains "...[Levertoff] understood the importance of an intellectual appeal and the necessity of expressing the theological concepts of Christianity in Jewish terms (according to him, along the lines of the Shekinah teaching and of Hasidic mysticism)."<sup>70</sup> Gillet first refers to *Christ and the Shekinah* in 1939 and later in 1942. It was obviously a late writing (most likely begun in the late 1930s) and by the tone of Gillet's comments very serious to Levertoff. *Christ and the Shekinah* is only mentioned here because of the potential importance it could have in answering the question which is still unanswered: How successful was Levertoff in creating a theology of Jewish-Christianity melding Hassidic theology with the New Testament? This question is especially important to modern JBJ who struggle with practically the same

<sup>64</sup> Olga Tatjana Levertoff, "Paul Levertoff and the Jewish-Christian Problem", 109.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Leonard Prager, *Yiddish Culture in Britain*, 405; Cf. Yitzhak Bakon, "Rumors" in *From Within the Band* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus Publishing, 1982) [Hebrew].

<sup>66</sup> Paul Levertoff, "Editorial Notes" in *The Church and the Jews*, No. 175, London (July 1953), 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Klausner, *Jesus Of Nazareth*, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Lev Gillet, "Questions Concernant la Chekinah" in Lev Gillet (ed.), *Judaism and Christianity/Essays presented to the Rev. Paul P. Levertoff*, 33; This quote is translated from the French.

<sup>69</sup> Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah* (Lutterworth Press, 1942), 84 n. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah*, 203.

question of how to establish a feasible theology for JBJs that is compatible with the New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

Not the average missionary apostate as the Jewish press might have depicted at various times, Levertoff continued to write in Hebrew and English in his final two decades. His Hebrew Christian church service did not seem to thrive after his death on 31 July 1954. He followed in the footsteps of Michael Solomon Alexander in establishing a Hebrew Christian Church connected to the Anglican Church. In hindsight, unlike other JBJ *maskilim* such as Herschensohn-Lichtenstein, Isaac Salkinson,<sup>72</sup> or Hayyim Yedidiah Pollak, today Levertoff is more remembered and this because of his major scholarly achievements. For example, the English edition of the Zohar he helped translate is still widely used today. His Hebrew Torah service at Holy Trinity portended at things to come half a century later in the USA with the formation of the modern Messianic Jewish congregational movement. Additionally, he is still published in Israel today: his book *Ben ha-Adam*<sup>73</sup> and translation *ha-Amek She'ala*<sup>74</sup> have been reprinted. As probably the last of the JBJ *maskilim* in the early 20th century,<sup>75</sup> Levertoff lived in the twilight of the *Haskalah* and died 31 July 1954, at the dawn of the modern Jewish state. He is today perhaps more relevant to us than he was 75 years ago when he seemed nothing more than a fringe theological curiosity. He was both a congregational leader and capable Jewish scholar; he engaged and interacted with Jewish thinkers, and helped the Hebrew-Christian movement push in directions which reflected the modes of thought of traditional Judaism. Suggested topics for future investigation are the relationship his Hebrew writings have had in the history of Modern Hebrew literature and his polemic relation with the Jewish intellectuals of his time.

<sup>71</sup> I tried with great effort to locate *Christ and the Shekinah* to no avail.

<sup>72</sup> Hanna Scolnicov, "The Hebrew Who Turned Christian: The First Translator of Shakespeare into the Holy Tongue" in *Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 54: Shakespeare and Religions*, Peter Holland (ed.), November (2001), 182-190.

<sup>73</sup> Jerusalem: Dolphin (1968).

<sup>74</sup> Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit (1999).

<sup>75</sup> Cf., "...missionaries tried to reach the maskil through Hebrew as late as the third decade of the [twentieth century]" (Leonard Prager. *Yiddish Culture in Britain*, 391).